

Seeing Is Believing: Missouri DOT Convinces Skeptics That Roundabouts Work

Location

State of Missouri
(Central United States)

Implementation Stage

- ✓ Planning

Roundabout Type/Setting

Single-lane roundabouts in urban, suburban, and rural settings

Target Audience

- ✓ General Public
- ✓ Elected Officials/Managers

Strategies Employed

- ✓ Meeting with local elected officials and planning commission members privately to gain buy in, then giving presentations at city council meetings, planning commissions, community service groups, neighborhood associations, etc.
- ✓ Meeting with journalists in the area to discuss roundabouts
- ✓ Targeting younger people who become ambassadors to their parents, educating them about new concepts, and address concerns of older drivers, who often then become advocates for roundabouts
- ✓ Offering a roundabout video and distribute it as widely as possible



Background

The first roundabout in the State of Missouri, built about 10 years ago, was designed for a golf course community in the Kansas City area. Even in that context, trying to convince the local community that a roundabout would work was difficult. Many people confused modern roundabouts with European-style traffic circles, and assumed they were hard to navigate, and intimidating to drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists alike. To overcome these misconceptions, traffic engineers from the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) held local public meetings to explain the difference between roundabouts and traffic circles, how modern roundabouts work, and why they were more desirable than adding a new traffic signal within a quarter mile of an existing signalized intersection. MoDOT's larger goal was to build many roundabouts in the Kansas City area, but the difficulties MoDOT experienced trying to gain public acceptance of this first roundabout became the catalyst for a proactive outreach and education program focused on the benefits of roundabouts.

Since the implementation of this first roundabout, MoDOT has installed over two dozen roundabouts in the Kansas City area, increasing community support over time with each new project. For every roundabout project, staff used a variety of outreach techniques to reach all target audiences and age groups who might be affected by the project.

Approach

MoDOT began actively introducing roundabouts into Missouri communities about eight years ago. Its outreach approach communicated a core set of messages explaining the benefits of roundabouts compared with traditional signalized intersections, including that they are safer for vehicles and pedestrians, they reduce congestion and emissions, and, in some cases, they can decrease the amount of right-of-way needed compared with signalized or stop-controlled alternatives.

The first strategy MoDOT uses to build support is "showing up." When a roundabout is planned, MoDOT staff reach out to community groups, town council, and civic meeting forums and offer to give a roundabouts presentation. They invite local journalists to attend and report on the meeting and/or roundabout project. They talk directly with skeptics about their concerns, and convey the benefits roundabouts provide. MoDOT has also distributed a video, titled *All About a Roundabout*, via YouTube and to driver education programs across the state. They also speak to driver education classes about roundabouts. MoDOT has found that if young people are taught early about roundabouts, they can become champions, enabling them to teach their parents about roundabouts. MoDOT also visits places where senior citizens gather, such as community centers, to help ensure older drivers and pedestrians understand how to navigate roundabouts.

"...Young people help us get the roundabout message to the community."

**– Steve Porter,
MoDOT**

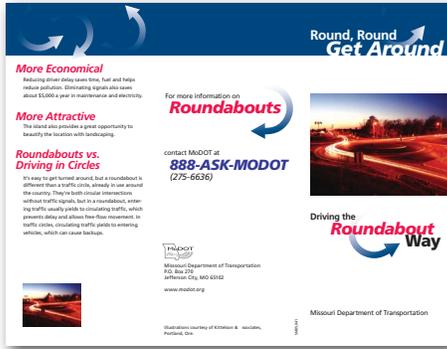


Figure 1: MoDOT's roundabout brochure is a proven tool for communicating effectively to the public about roundabouts.

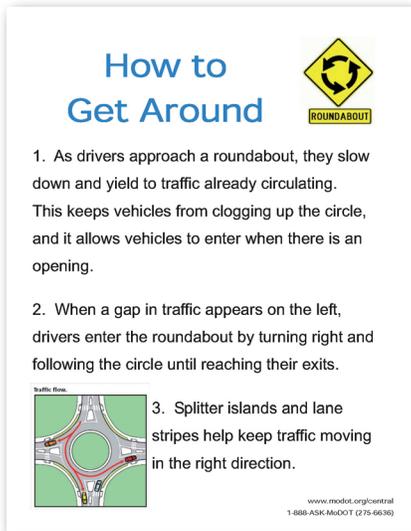


Figure 2: MoDOT uses this flyer as a quick attention-grabber to explain roundabouts to various citizen demographics.

Learn More

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MoDOT staff also work with individuals who are skeptical that their vehicles will be unable to traverse a roundabout safely due to size and/or turning radius. For example, the transportation director for the Belton school district, who doubted the roundabout would work, insisted on a test drive with a school bus on the roundabout before the pavement had been laid. Naturally, the bus driver experienced some difficulties, resulting in a flurry of phone calls to the mayor's office from concerned parents. One month later, after the pavement was set, MoDOT staff invited the transportation director and the bus driver to drive the roundabout again. The second time was the charm, and the director became a strong proponent of roundabouts. The presence of journalists for the test drive on the completed roundabout made the community aware of the director's support for the roundabout, convincing even more people of the project's value.

Results

There are currently more than two dozen roundabouts in the Kansas City area. MoDOT believes this is a direct result of their successful outreach efforts. Steve Porter, senior public relations specialist with MoDOT notes that once people experience modern roundabout intersections, "They believe."

Older drivers have also been convinced: A senior citizen approached a MoDOT official at a local town council meeting to admit that he had been skeptical of the roundabouts when they were first proposed, but a year after their completion he had come to realize that they were "the right thing to do."

Lessons Learned

- Initiate outreach with the community at the first hint that a roundabout intersection might be considered.
- Reach out to the elders of the community. Talk with them, explain how roundabouts work and their advantages. They will "get it" and support you.
- Target high schools because young people are eager to learn new concepts and become ambassadors.

Outreach Investment

MoDOT considers its outreach investment to be relatively moderate. The MoDOT Central Office in Jefferson City produced the roundabouts video and the brochures, and maintains the website. On occasion, custom-produced, project-specific flyers have been developed for some roundabout projects.

Related Products

General Information Website

<https://www.modot.org/roundabouts>

Brochure

Round, Round, Get Around – Driving the Roundabout Way

https://epg.modot.org/files/4/4d/233.3_Round,_Round_Get_Around.pdf

Video

All About a Roundabout

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0RcTWEBtYM>